



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**SOC/474**  
**Youth Employment Package**

Brussels, 21 March 2013

**OPINION**

of the  
European Economic and Social Committee  
on the  
**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European  
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions -  
Moving Youth into Employment**  
COM(2012) 727 final

---

Rapporteur-general: **Pavel Trantina**  
Co-rapporteur-general: **Philippe de Buck**

---

On 19 December 2012 the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

*Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Moving Youth into Employment*  
COM(2012) 727 final.

On 13 November 2012 the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship to prepare the Committee's work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Pavel Trantina as rapporteur-general and Mr Philippe de Buck as co-rapporteur-general at its 488th plenary session, held on 20 and 21 March 2013 (meeting of 21 March 2013), and adopted the following opinion by 174 votes to 4 with 1 abstention.

\*

\* \*

## 1. **Summary of recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC reiterates its oft expressed denouncement of the catastrophic youth unemployment rate and asks all stakeholders for urgent, effective and definitive measures in order to break the vicious circle, which risks compromising the future of an entire generation. It is high time for proper investment in young people, whose fruits will be harvested in the long term.
- 1.2 At the same time the EESC stresses that a real growth strategy at EU and national level is needed to support the creation of more and more stable jobs, because they are a pre-condition for the success of measures to bring young people into employment. This requires a coordinated approach to all the efforts and policies aimed at strengthening competitiveness and at restoring the confidence of investors and households. The European Semester provides an opportunity to recommend adequate policies and reforms to be implemented in each Member State.
- 1.3 The EESC welcomes the Youth Employment Package proposal and recommends that special attention be given to its application at Member State level, by making measures to combat youth unemployment an important part of the National Reform Programmes.
- 1.4 The EESC supports the idea of the establishment of youth guarantee schemes in the Member States being funded through a specific Youth Employment Initiative Fund, within the Multiannual Financial Framework and appreciates its creation, noting that it must be

complemented at national level. However, the EESC considers it insufficient to finance this fund with just EUR 6 billion, which will come partly from existing money from the European Social Fund. Furthermore, given that the fund will only support regions where youth unemployment is over 25%, the EESC stresses that other regions should be able to access financial support under the standard ESF procedures. It is, however, necessary to act immediately, financing the proposed measures with new funds, without creating competition among the young people and other disadvantaged categories in the ESF framework.

- 1.5 The EESC supports the approach of the Commission according to which the "Youth Guarantee is to be implemented by a comprehensive and holistic scheme that ensures that young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months after having left school or becoming unemployed". The EESC understands that there are differences between Member States and recognises the importance of enabling them to set the age ceiling in line with their respective needs and possibilities. However, it recommends that, whenever possible, the age limit for access to the scheme be increased to 30, to cover young people who leave university later or those who are still in a transition phase from education to employment and are still at risk of losing contact with the labour market, especially in the countries with the highest youth unemployment.
- 1.6 The EESC also welcomes the political agreement of the EPSCO Council reached on 28 February 2013 on the proposal of the Youth Guarantee. However, the EESC considers intervention after four months to be too late. The Youth Guarantee should take effect as early as possible, ideally when registering at a job centre<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.7 The EESC considers it fundamental, for the full and correct implementation of the Youth Guarantee, to define better and more clearly, at EU and national level, the instruments, the responsibilities, the goals and the indicators for the monitoring. For this reason the EESC proposes that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee be included among the indicators in the European Semester process.
- 1.8 Based on the successful examples from some Member States, the social partners and youth organisations and their representative platforms should play a key role in designing, implementing, promoting and monitoring the scheme.
- 1.9 Reforms of the EURES services, and, where necessary, of the Public Employment Services in the Member States should also actively support young people and adapt their services and approaches in order to make them more accessible. Personalised career counselling and guidance must be put in place already in schools.

---

<sup>1</sup> [EUR/005: EESC Opinion on Annual Growth Survey 201 \(not yet published\)](#).

1.10 The conditions for offering traineeships and apprenticeships should be improved. High quality standards for traineeships and apprenticeships must be ensured through specific criteria that should be made mandatory when requesting financial support. As a complement to this, better mechanisms for monitoring and safeguarding the rights of the trainees should be introduced.

## 2. Summary of the Commission initiatives

2.1 Overall employment rates for young people fell by almost five percentage points over the last four years - three times as much as for adults. The chances for a young unemployed person of finding a job are low: only 29.7% of those aged 15-24 and unemployed in 2010 found a job in 2011, a fall of almost 10% in three years. More than 30% of unemployed people under 25 have been unemployed for more than 12 months - 1.6 million in 2011, compared to 0.9 million in 2008. According to Eurofound, 14 million young people in the EU aged 15-29 (7.5 million young people aged 15-24) are NEETs - not in employment, education or training<sup>2</sup>. The economic cost of not integrating young people into the labour market has been estimated at over EUR 150 billion per year, or 1.2% of EU GDP. The social consequences include phenomena such as disengagement from society and mistrust of the political system, low levels of autonomy, fear of the unknown and "brain-waste".

2.2 The European Commission has presented its Youth Employment Package, which includes four areas of action. The first is a proposed recommendation to Member States on introducing a Youth Guarantee to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 receive a quality offer of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The proposed recommendation urges Member States to establish strong partnerships with stakeholders, ensure early intervention by employment services and other partners supporting young people, take supportive measures to enable labour integration, make full use of the European Social Fund and other structural funds to that end, assess and continuously improve the Youth Guarantee schemes and implement the schemes rapidly. The Commission will support Member States through EU funding, by promoting exchanges of good practice among Member States, monitoring implementation of Youth Guarantees in the European Semester exercise and awareness-raising.

2.3 To facilitate school-to-work transitions, the Package also launches a consultation of European social partners on a Quality Framework for Traineeships intended to enable young people to acquire high-quality work experience under safe conditions.

2.4 Furthermore, the Commission announces the creation of a European Alliance for Apprenticeships to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships available by spreading

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/labourmarket/youth.htm>.

successful apprenticeship schemes across the Member States and outlines ways to reduce obstacles to mobility for young people.

- 2.5 Finally, with regard to the substantial differences between the levels of youth unemployment in the various Member States, the Commission suggests measures to increase the trans-national mobility of young workers, mainly improvement of the EURES system.
- 2.6 The proposed measures in the Youth Employment Package build on the actions of the "Youth Opportunities Initiative", launched in December 2011. The Commission also uses other policy instruments to address youth unemployment, such as the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs). In July 2012, recommendations<sup>3</sup> aimed at improving the situation of young people were issued to almost all the EU Member States.

### 3. **General comments on the Commission's package**

- 3.1 A real growth strategy at EU and national level is needed to support the creation of more and more stable jobs. This requires a coordinated approach to all the efforts and policies aimed at strengthening competitiveness and at restoring the confidence of investors and households. The European Semester provides an opportunity to recommend adequate policies and reforms to be implemented in each Member State. Synergic effects, such as including social aspects in public calls, should not be underestimated.
- 3.2 The situation of Europe's youth on the labour market is a matter of key concern. In order to facilitate the smooth transition of young people into employment it is important that the requisite measures are taken to:
- reduce all the obstacles that hinder the entry of young people into the labour market;
  - reduce mismatches between skills supply and demand;
  - support young people's autonomy;
  - increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training, in particular apprenticeships in strategically important subjects such as technology and engineering;
  - promote partnerships and synergies between all stakeholders;
  - encourage and support businesses to create jobs and traineeships for young people.
- 3.3 The EESC welcomes the Commission's long-term focus on young people. In this regard, the Youth Employment Package presents another step forward in the direction of building a coherent and integrated approach to tackle youth unemployment and promote a quality transition from education to the labour market. However, it must be taken into account that special attention should be directed towards the Member States, who are the main actors in the field of youth employment and are expected to take subsequent action within the next few months. Nevertheless, given the urgency of the situation and the crucial importance of

---

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/131662.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/131662.pdf)

investing in young people as a key resource in the labour market, this is not enough. It is of the utmost importance to build up trust by establishing common principles for the Youth Guarantee in Europe with the aim of increasing the quality, accessibility and impact of the tool throughout the continent.

3.4 The EESC is ready to contribute actively to the design and promotion of the Package, as:

- its members, representing the employers, trade unions and other civil society organisations, have been involved in the processes leading to better employment of young people on a long-term basis, have the necessary contacts and therefore outreach, and have developed numerous initiatives to cope with youth unemployment;
- the EESC has a wide expertise, having organised a number of conferences, hearings and seminars in recent years<sup>4</sup> and produced a number of important opinions on the same subject<sup>5</sup>.

3.5 The EESC welcomes the draft recommendation from the European Commission on the introduction of the Youth Guarantee to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 receive a quality offer of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The guarantee, if applied properly, could represent an important step for investing in young people, can reduce the huge costs that youth unemployment engenders for both individuals and Europe as a whole and can play a key role in increasing the quality and the effectiveness of the transition of young people from education to employment. However, the EESC considers intervention after four months to be too late. The Youth Guarantee should take effect as early as possible, ideally when registering at a job centre.

3.6 The EESC supports the idea of the establishment of youth guarantee schemes in the Member States being funded through a specific Youth Employment Initiative Fund within the Multiannual Financial Framework and appreciates its creation, noting that it must be complemented at national level. However, the EESC considers it insufficient to finance it with just EUR 6 billion and partly with the existing money coming from the European Social Fund. Moreover, considering that the loss due to not integrating young people into the labour market (in terms of excess welfare transfers and foregone earnings and unpaid taxes) stands at over EUR 150 billion per year (1.2% of EU GDP)<sup>6</sup>, and that the ILO has concluded that

---

4 Conference "[The Economic Crisis, Education and the Labour Market](#)" – Brussels, 24 January 2012; Conference "[From School to Work](#)" organised by LMO – Roskilde (DK), 4 February 2012; Conference "[Quality jobs for youth: are we asking too much?](#)" organised by LMO together with the European Youth Forum – 20 April 2012; [Group III Conference Youth Education and Employment within the Europe 2020 Strategy](#) – Sofia, 8 June 2012; Group I Conference "[The Future of Youth in Europe - European Youth: Hope or Despair for the New Generation?](#)" – Versailles, 29-30 August 2012.

5 [OJ C 132, 3.5.2011, p. 55-62](#); [OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 50-55](#); [OJ C 68, 6.3.2012, p. 11-14](#); [OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 143-149](#); [OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 150-153](#); [OJ C 68, 6.3.2012, p. 1-10](#); [OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 154-159](#); [OJ C 299, 4.10.2012, p. 97-102](#):: EESC Opinion on [Towards a job-rich recovery](#) [OJ C 11, 15.1.2013, p. 65](#).

6 <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1254.htm>.

investing EUR 21 billion can lead to significant change within a few years<sup>7</sup>, the EESC considers the Youth Guarantee to be a useful social measure with a huge positive cost-benefit impact.

- 3.7 The EESC supports the approach of the Commission according to which the "Youth Guarantee is to be implemented by a comprehensive and holistic scheme that ensures that young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months after having left school or becoming unemployed". The EESC understands that there are differences between Member States and recognises the importance of enabling them to set the age ceiling in line with their respective needs and possibilities. However, it recommends that, whenever possible, the age limit for access to the scheme be increased to 30, to cover young people who leave university later or those who are still in a transition phase from education to employment and are still at risk of losing contact with the labour market, especially in the countries with the highest youth unemployment. Moreover, the Youth Guarantee must become a structural measure in the EU active labour market policies and not only in this period of crisis.
- 3.8 The EESC believes that it is important to develop clear quality standards and indicators regarding the development and implementation of youth guarantee schemes at European and national level. Traineeships undertaken in the framework of the youth guarantee scheme must be in line with the quality framework for traineeships and should also enable young people to live independently. Member States are also encouraged to develop personalised career counselling and guidance and to introduce mechanisms for monitoring the different opportunities offered and assessing the impact of the scheme on the beneficiaries' subsequent transition into work.
- 3.9 The EESC emphasises that the Youth Guarantee initiative should be integrated into the framework of an active labour market strategy aimed at supporting young people's lasting insertion in the labour market in order to gain their autonomy. Another important part of such a strategy should cover reforms of the Public Employment Services in the Member States, where necessary, oriented towards actively reaching out to young people and adapting their services and approaches in order to make them more accessible whilst further improving the services they provide to all unemployed people. The PES should cooperate with educational institutions, making direct contact with young people and offering them a work or further training opportunity in the framework of a proactive, tailored mentoring approach, early on before they leave school. The EESC urges the European Commission to consider this element in its support strategy for the PES in Europe. In this regard, EURES services should be better adapted to the needs of young people and promoted much more intensively amongst the younger generation.

---

7

International Institute for Labour Studies of the International Labour Organization in its study "EuroZone job crisis: trends and policy responses".

- 3.10 The EESC also recommends that Member States boost support for enterprises, cooperatives and third sector organisations wishing to participate in youth guarantee schemes in close cooperation with the PES. Mechanisms such as tax incentives, subsidies for the fixed costs of employment and the possibility to access funding for in-site training are important elements for making the scheme work and supporting enterprises wishing to invest in young people's potential in a proper and effective way. Their application should be connected with the fulfilment of quality frameworks/guidelines and involve the establishment of monitoring mechanisms. The EESC considers it necessary to support capacity building of all actors involved in quality apprenticeship systems.
- 3.11 The EESC considers that the social partners have a fundamental role to play in the design, implementation and monitoring of the scheme. A sound social dialogue is fundamental in order to offer young people youth guarantee schemes with high quality standards for both enterprises and young people. In this context, it is also important to involve the social partners in monitoring the implementation of the youth guarantee and of the employment or training offers made available under the different schemes.
- 3.12 Another important role is played by third sector organisations, especially youth organisations and their representative platforms, which are important participation channels for young people, enabling them to develop their competences and get the right working relationships and behaviour; and it is therefore important to involve them also in the design and implementation of the schemes. Various social enterprises and other relevant stakeholders could also be involved. The Committee also draws attention to the good practices with respect to stakeholder involvement put in place in Austria<sup>8</sup>, Sweden and Finland<sup>9</sup>.
- 3.13 Another priority should be to increase access to the scheme for youth organisations and third sector organisations. By participating, they would be able to submit bids for jobs to improve their local communities and therefore play a beneficial role both for young people and society.
- 3.14 The EESC considers it key to equip the proposal with adequate means to support Member States and regions wishing to establish ambitious youth guarantee schemes or apprenticeship alliances. In this framework, the EESC wishes to recommend that the money from the EU be allocated to those schemes that comply with the minimum quality standards set through the EU initiative and by Member States.
- 3.15 Consequently, the EESC supports the idea of the establishment of youth guarantee schemes in the Member States being funded through a specific Youth Employment Initiative, financed within the Multiannual Financial Framework, and equipped with at least EUR 6 billion of which half will be taken from the European Social Fund. The EESC welcomes the creation of

---

<sup>8</sup> [http://issuu.com/yomag/docs/youth\\_guarantee](http://issuu.com/yomag/docs/youth_guarantee).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1242.htm>.



the fund but, given that it will only support regions where youth unemployment is over 25%, stresses that other regions should be able to access financial support under the standard ESF procedures. This money will constitute a fundamental source, complementing the necessary investments from national budgets.

- 3.16 In order to equip young people with the skills that will be fundamental in their future professional life, the EESC urges the Commission and the Member States to ensure, that the measures introduced to stimulate youth employment, especially those funded entirely or partly by the EU funds, are more effective and permanent, so that young people do not need to be supported subsequently after a temporary or unpaid placement.
- 3.17 As the establishment of the youth guarantee will be effective only if it is integrated into EU and national approaches oriented towards growth and jobs, the EESC repeats the call it has already made several times for the definition of new targets to reduce youth unemployment<sup>10</sup>. This should be a key element of the national reform programmes related to the EU 2020 strategy.

#### 4. **Specific comments on the Commission's proposals**

##### 4.1 *The Youth Guarantee*

- 4.1.1 The EESC welcomes the fact that the Commission's Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee contains a number of important features, including a clear definition of the youth guarantee as "a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education". However, the EESC considers intervention after four months to be too late. The Youth Guarantee should take effect as early as possible, ideally when registering at a job centre.
- 4.1.2 It is important to acknowledge the cost-effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee investments as, according to Eurofound<sup>11</sup>, the annual Europe-wide loss due to having young people not in employment, education or training (in terms of excess welfare transfers and foregone earnings and unpaid taxes) currently stands at 1.2% of GDP, or EUR 153 billion. At the same time, when investing to combat this loss, we have to concentrate on better partnerships, the improvement of related services and the empowerment of education providers.
- 4.1.3 The EESC stresses the need for proper validation of non-formal education (NFE) as a way of valorising competencies required on the labour market.

---

<sup>10</sup> [OJ C 143, 22.5.2012, p. 94–101](#) and SOC/477: EESC opinion on "[Employment Policy Guidelines](#)" (not published yet).

<sup>11</sup> NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe (2012).

- 4.1.4 The EESC draws attention to the new typologies of the NEET and to the need to focus also on categories traditionally considered not to be at risk of exclusion, such as graduates and young people who already have some professional or internship experience but are not yet able to access the labour market permanently.
- 4.1.5 The rising number of qualified and skilled young people forced to work below their potential and experiencing "brain waste", should be also addressed, as it results not only in their employment in jobs where they cannot use their education and training, but also has a socially and psychologically harmful effect on these individuals. A better and more appropriate match between personal skills and the needs of the labour market could reduce this phenomenon.

#### 4.2 *Quality Framework for Traineeships*

- 4.2.1 The EESC acknowledges the positive role that quality traineeships can play in facilitating young people's access to employment and helping enterprises to find potential skilled workers. Such experience can ensure that young people acquire the necessary competencies that meet their needs and previously acquired skills, whilst receiving appropriate compensation and gaining access to social protection and to other educational pathways in the Life Long Learning framework. In this framework, one of the areas which attention should focus on is traineeships taking place outside of the educational system, especially after graduation, which should be considered as work placements and therefore protected according to the internationally accepted labour standards.
- 4.2.2 The EESC stresses the importance of setting high quality standards for apprenticeships, work placements and traineeships. In this framework it restates its commitment to "closely monitoring and supporting all initiatives for improving the quality of work placements and traineeships, such as the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships put forward by the European Youth Forum, in order to strengthen the civil dialogue for establishing appropriate rules in this area"<sup>12</sup>.
- 4.2.3 The EESC is convinced that increasing the quality of traineeships is a priority and therefore views the European Commission's initiative on the European Quality Framework on Traineeships as progress in this direction. At the same time, the EESC urges all the institutions, Member States and social partners involved, to make the most effective use of the results of current consultations, taking into consideration the support previously expressed by the social partners, NGOs, members of the public, and a number of education providers. The EU institutions must act quickly and create a framework for quality traineeships and continued direct involvement of young people and their organisations in this process alongside the social partners. In this regard, the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships<sup>13</sup> proposes minimum quality standards to bridge the gaps between countries

---

<sup>12</sup> [OJ C 299, 4.10.2012, p. 97-102.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [http://qualityinternships.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/internship\\_charter\\_EN.pdf](http://qualityinternships.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/internship_charter_EN.pdf).

in Europe in terms of learning processes, available guidance and mentoring, social and labour rights, recognition of skills, legal contract provisions, reimbursement and remuneration, evaluation and monitoring, etc.

- 4.2.4 The EESC also considers it fundamental that such a framework be oriented towards supporting enterprises in their efforts to offer high quality traineeships for young people. Therefore, the framework should also be implemented at national level through measures directed towards this objective.

#### 4.3 *European Alliance for Apprenticeships*

- 4.3.1 The EESC is convinced of the utility of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, as close cooperation between educational institutions, enterprises and social partners, as well as policy makers, practitioners and youth representatives, is essential for the success of vocational education and training. This is proved by the success of dual learning systems in some Member States. The development of the Alliance should encourage the sharing of knowledge and ideas and ultimately help to boost the number and quality of apprenticeship positions available across the Member States and encourage the participation of young people in such schemes.

- 4.3.2 The Alliance should also support European and national campaigns for changing the perception of vocational education, including in the context of the Copenhagen process, and organise a regular forum for discussions on monitoring of the European apprenticeship strategy with the relevant European and national stakeholders in this area.

- 4.3.3 Incentives should also be provided to facilitate funding for cross-border training activities enabling companies and social partners to become involved in the establishment of a dual system. More proposals can be found in the publication "Creating Opportunities for Youth: How to improve the quality and image of apprenticeships" (BusinessEurope, 2012)<sup>14</sup> or in the Spanish-German trade union agreement on quality standards for apprenticeships.

#### 4.4 *Mobility for young people*

- 4.4.1 The EESC believes that, with a view to fostering the mobility of young workers, Member States must make further progress towards the mutual recognition of qualifications and skills, and towards the compatibility of national social security systems, especially of pension systems and further invest in language learning as language barriers also need to be overcome. The Commission should further strengthen social security coordination to ensure that not a single month of social security contributions is "lost" due to work in another EU country.

---

14 <http://www.businesseurope.eu/Content/default.asp?pageid=568&docid=29967>.

- 4.4.2 The EESC stresses the utility of EU mobility programmes such as Erasmus and Youth in Action, for the mobility of young people and supporting the development of their skills, competences and character, through volunteering and other civic initiatives. The EESC asks for the proper financing of the future Erasmus for all/YES Europe programme in the new Multiannual Financial Framework, which is now lacking EUR 1 billion contrary to the initial proposal.
- 4.4.3 The EESC supports further improvements of and investment in the "Your first EURES Job" Initiative. Specifically, the EESC calls on the European Commission to introduce such improvements to EURES, which would increase its visibility and availability for young people, as well as its user-friendliness. Young people must be actively encouraged to participate, in order to overcome obstacles stemming from cultural and language barriers and their lack of organisational skills and fear of the unknown. This could be done through an improved career and personal advice system, which would support students, trainees (and young people in general) in becoming more aware of their desires, capabilities and job opportunities. This also includes advice regarding employment law and socio-political environment and advice regarding the rights and obligations of both employers and workers.
- 4.4.4 The EESC supports the initiative of the European Parliament aimed at updating the Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications. The current directive is out of date as many professions develop rapidly. Furthermore, modernising the directive would involve introducing an electronic card detailing a professional's qualifications and experience. This would make it easier for professionals to find work and to have qualifications recognised in another Member State and would harmonise training, competencies and practices in the EU. It would also encourage mobility and sharing of expertise.

Brussels, 21 March 2013

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

Staffan Nilsson

---